

The Electric Mercury

U.S. Army Medical Command Electronic News Summary, November 2003

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Great American Smokeout : Bullets or butts – which kill more?

A special package, including front-page art, commentaries and a two-page spread of articles, highlights the lifesaving message of the Nov. 20 Great American Smokeout. Included are:

— The **monthly column** by **LTG James B. Peake**, Army Surgeon General and MEDCOM Commander, who notes that many things the AMEDD does are aimed at assuring “Healthy and Medically Protected Soldiers.” With over 30 percent of Soldiers being smokers, the Great American Smokeout is part of that effort. Smoking is an unhealthy choice that impacts readiness, from visual acuity, to predisposition for acute pulmonary problems, to slow wound healing, not to mention heart disease, chronic pulmonary disease, atherosclerotic disease, and lung cancer.

— An article on **the dangers of smoking** by MAJ Paul A. Kennedy, William Beaumont Army Medical Center. Cigarette use kills half of all continuing smokers. Cigarettes kill more Americans – in 2002, some 430,700 – than alcohol, car accidents, suicide, AIDS, homicide, and illegal drugs. Cigarette smoking is a major cause of cancers of lung, larynx, oral cavity, pharynx and esophagus and a contributing cause for cancers of the bladder, pancreas, uterine cervix, kidney, stomach, and some leukemias. Smoking is a major cause of heart disease, bronchitis, emphysema and stroke, and it worsens colds and pneumonia. Tobacco damages women's health and increases risk of miscarriage, pre-term delivery, stillbirth, infant death, and low birth weight. Also, secondhand smoke from cigarettes has an injurious health effect on others.

— An article about **the fast and important benefits of quitting tobacco use**, by Jack L. Gillund of Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Blood pressure and pulse rate drop just 20 minutes after quitting. Blood circulation and temperature in hands and feet improve. Eight hours after stopping, carbon dioxide in the blood returns to normal. In 24 hours, heart-attack risks start to drop. In five years, the lung-cancer death rate of people who quit is about one-half that of smokers. In 10 or 15 years, the risk is back to that of nonsmokers. The article also offers tips for quitting, including the **four Ds**: **D**eep breathing (slowly inhale and exhale); **D**rink lots of water throughout the day (especially during a craving); **D**o something else to get your mind off the craving (call a friend, go for a walk, chew on a carrot stick); **D**elay reaching for a cigarette. Above all, do not stop quitting. Quitting often takes more than one try.

— An article on **hazards of smokeless tobacco**, by SSG David G. Fraembs, 345th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment. Health problems caused by smokeless tobacco include periodontal disease, mouth lesions, receding gums, exposed roots, cavities, tooth/bone loss, etc. Snuff users are 50 times more likely to get oral cancer than non-users. Other risks include increased risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke and high cholesterol. Snuff users have more trouble quitting than smokers. A can of snuff can contain as much nicotine as three packs of cigarettes.

— A U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine list of **websites** that provide more information on tobacco-use risks and cessation.

— A **commentary** by Harry Noyes points out that cigarette use can help the enemy acquire American targets on the battlefield and cites historical examples, including the sinking of a U.S. submarine in World War II. In addition, a World War II medic captured in the Battle of the Bulge reported that American prisoners deprived of tobacco had serious psychological reactions. Other important stories in this month's edition of the *Mercury* include:

● Army medic SGT Tommy Morris develops Battlefield Medical Information System-Tactical, or BMIST, a point-of-care diagnostic tool for first responders. Input basic data by tapping the screen of a handheld personal digital assistant, and BMIST offers a treatment plan for the user's skill level. It lets busy medics quickly create paperless medical records, which can be sent with the patient on removable storage media, such as the Personal Information Carrier. BMIST is part of the Theater Medical Information Program, so all encounters can be transmitted to the Composite Health Care System II and other electronic databases. BMIST can hold notes on medics' patients, plus electronic medical references. It can even order supplies. Limited fielding has begun.

● Army Behavioral Health Technology Office is automating vital aspects of behavioral health care, reducing administrative burdens so providers can focus on clinical work. Automation also provides leaders with near-real-time data, so they can make better decisions about where to focus combat-stress efforts. The Behavioral Health Automated Virtual Record System (BHAVRS), now in development, retains a confidential record of a soldier's contacts with behavioral health services, separate from regular medical records. BHAVRS, cornerstone of automated behavioral health services, will let behavioral health records travel with soldiers when they move.

● SPC Russell A. Burnham, a medic in the 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, at Fort Lewis, Wash., was named Army Soldier of the Year after competition at Fort Lee, Va., Sept. 14-16.

● 113th Combat Stress Control Company is one of four combat-stress detachments of seven or eight people in Iraq. Teams consist of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and enlisted mental-health experts. Stress teams go to soldiers between 24 and 72 hours after an incident.

● While most try to keep their summers insect-free, the insectary at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research painstakingly breeds thousands of them to test repellents, drugs and vaccines.

● Army physicians distinguish themselves in national testing. MAJ Catherine Winslow, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, gets the highest score on the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery's certification exam. For the fourth year in a row, doctors in emergency-medicine residency program at Fort Hood, Texas, outscore 125 civilian and military programs to record the highest test average in the nation on an annual in-training exam. CPT Chad Crystal is one of the top five residents in the nation.

● LTC Patrick D. Sargent, commander of 421st Medical Evacuation Battalion, is first Army officer to receive the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.'s General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., Military Award. The award is for a field-grade officer outstanding in both professional and community service.

● Walter Reed Army Medical Center dedicates new physical fitness facility in honor of LTC Karen J. Wagner, a Medical Service Corps officer killed in the attack on the Pentagon.

● Fort Knox, Ky.; Pensacola Naval Air Station, Fla.; the U.S.S. *Ronald Reagan* and the Defense Supply Center Richmond win division championships in National Softball Association's Military World Series at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. More than 40 teams participate. Brian Munn of Walter Reed is outstanding offensive player in men's division B. Fort Sam Houston women win the relay-throw competition. Richard Tatem, director of sports and fitness at Walter Reed, receives the Lonnie O'Haver award, usually reserved for the outstanding team or player.

● COL Muhammad Shaukat, chief of anesthesia and operative services at Madigan Army Medical Center, is also a talented sculptor and painter.

● Marching through a cornfield where the stalks tower above your head can be a pain, says Thomas Strother. He learned this last year as a member of the 22nd North Carolina Infantry Regiment during the 140th anniversary reenactment of the Battle of Sharpsburg (Antietam).

● Photos: Lance Corporals Jimmy Guerra and Joseph Newman, wounded in Iraq, look at donated clothes at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany; Soldiers from 48th Combat Support Hospital use Forward Deployable Digital Medical Treatment Facility at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa.; LTC Bryan Kelly, commander of 883rd Medical Company, throws out first pitch of Boston Red Sox/Chicago White Sox baseball game; Dr. William Rodriguez and Dr. Douglas Knittel, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology forensic pathologists, survey mass gravesite in Iraq.

● Letter-to-the-editor: Jan Clark of Fort Leonard Wood MEDDAC praises AMEDD's customer relations guru, Michael Meines of Madigan Army Medical Center, for his inspirational work as director of the Army Medical Department's Center of Excellence for Customer Relations.

● Flu and colds cause more health-care visits than any other type of illness, writes a U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine expert, who offers tips for avoiding them.